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ABSTRACT

In winter 1982-83, a survey was conducted of registration and assessment procedures used in California's community colleges. The survey, which was sent to 106 institutions, sought information on the colleges' procedures in the areas of course advising and registration, orientation, counseling, course changes, computer usage, testing requirements and uses. Study findings, based on responses from 99 colleges, included the following: (1) in 98 colleges, course advising was done by counselors and in 20 colleges by faculty; (2) the most common registration procedures were "arena" style (55 colleges), by mail (37 colleges), through individual conferences (33 colleges), and in large groups (20 colleges); (3) 84 colleges required or recommended orientation for at least some students; (4) 42 colleges required students to have a conference with a faculty member or counselor prior to registration; (5) 20 colleges required assessment for matriculation, and 32 recommended it; and (6) of the 62 colleges with a testing center, 41 indicated that it was open throughout the college year or calendar year. (LAL)

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Registration and Assessment Procedures at 99 California Community Colleges

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Abstract

The wide variation of registration and assessment practices reported in a recent survey of 99 California community colleges raises the question of whether such diversity best serves the students.

Registration and Assessment Procedures

at California Community Colleges:

Survey Report from 99 Colleges

Matriculation procedures at community colleges have come under increasing scrutiny as questions about under-prepared students, high attrition, and accountability have been raised by the public, legislatures, and college professionals themselves. Legislatures are now beginning to mandate specific matriculation procedures (Rounds, 1983).

In the winter of 1982-1983, a survey of registration and assessment procedures was sent to 106 California community colleges; the following article presents data from the 99 responding colleges (93.4%) and comments briefly on some of the specifics. (See Table 1 for details.)

Insert Table 1

Registration and Enrollment Practices

Advising Procedures

The question about advising procedures was answered by 99 colleges. In 97 colleges (98.0%)* counselors advised for classes; in 20 colleges, faculty assisted counselors. In 2 colleges, only faculty advised. Four colleges also involved classified staff to help with advising. Five colleges reported that others, such as paraprofessionals or peer counselors, also assisted.

*When the number closely approximates the percent, only the number will be given in the following discussion of the data. See Table 1 for exact percents.

Registration Procedures

The question about registration style was answered by 99 colleges. Fifty-five colleges registered in arena style, with 25 using arena registration only, 23 combining arena and mail registration, and 8 combining arena registration and individual conferences.

Thirty-three colleges used individual conferences for registration, 25 of which used them in combination with other procedures: 13, for example, combined conferences with mail-in registration, and 8 combined individual conferences with large group sessions.

Twenty colleges used some form of large-group registration, 5 using it only and 15 in conjunction with some other form of registration. Thirty-seven colleges used mail-in registration for at least part of their procedures, 1 college registering exclusively by mail: Of the 24 responses under "other," 18 mentioned use of the computer. Three colleges indicated only computer registration, and 4 used only mail and computer.

Orientation Sessions

Ninety-seven colleges responded in some way about orientation sessions for new students. Only 13 indicated no orientation session was offered, while 84 required or recommended orientation for at least some groups of students, generally new and/or fulltime. The duration of sessions

for the 25 colleges requiring orientation for new students ranged from a low of one-half hour, reported by 5 colleges, to a 48-hour session, required by 1 college. The mean, 4.1 hours, was skewed by the one 48-hour session, with the orientation of 20 of the 25 (80 percent) ranging form one-half to 3 hours in length.

The average length of the orientation sessions for the 54 colleges recommending such a session was 3.5 hours, with the range from one-half hour to 18 hours. The range for 37 colleges (75.5 percent of those recommending) was from one-half to 3 hours in length; 3 colleges, however, recommended 18-hour sessions.

For the 21 colleges indicating they provided orientation for special groups, 7.6 hours was the average, but this figure was skewed by 1 college requiring a 54-hour session. Although not asked to name specific special groups, a number did, naming such groups as re-entry students, non-native speakers of English, health service students, and students in California's special Extended Opportunities programs.

Conferences with Faculty or Counselors

Ninety-nine colleges responded to the question about a faculty or counselor conference prior to registration, with 42 colleges indicating they required a conference with a counselor prior to registration.

Six of these colleges provided the option of a counselor or faculty. The majority of colleges which marked that a conference was required, however, added that this conference was only for new students registering at least half- to full-time. Forty-nine colleges said they recommended a conference, 45 with a counselor (1 porviding the option of counselor or faculty) and 4 not indicating with whom. None of the 7 colleges which checked faculty conference checked it exclusively; in all cases it was an option to a counselor conference.

Of the 10 colleges checking that a conference was not needed, half qualified their responses to indicate that a conference was unnecessary only for a specific group of students, such as returning students, evening students, or part-time students. The majority of the 8 colleges which marked "other" on this question used that space to explain about conference requirements based on registration category.

Adding and Dropping Classes

Responses from the 93 colleges which answered the question about signatures for adds and drops indicated considerable variation in the regulations regarding adding and/or dropping courses. Seventeen colleges required a counselor's signature for both adds and drops, and 36 required faculty signatures for both; while in 26, signatures

were not needed either for adding or dropping. A counselor's signature was needed only for adding a class in 9 colleges and only for dropping in just 2; faculty signatures were required only for adding in 25 colleges and only for dropping in just 3.

A total of 65 colleges required faculty signatures for adding classes, while only 26 required counselor signatures. Thirty-nine colleges required faculty to sign drop cards, while only 19 required counselors to sign for dropping classes. Seven colleges made additional comments regarding adding classes and 9 made comments about dropping classes. In general, these comments referred to regulations which varied depending on the time of the semester; for example, 1 college observed that a faculty signature was needed to add a class during the first two weeks of the term, but after that, the dean's signature was also required. Several comments were made to distinguish signatures required for dropping a single class as opposed to withdrawing completely.

Computers for Registration

Ninety-four colleges responded to the question about use of the computer at registration. Eighty-four colleges used it to record and update registration; 34 used it to prevent unofficial adds and drops; and 14 colleges to prevent students from registering above the level at which

they were tested. Of this group of colleges, 23 used the computer not only to record and update registration but also to prevent unofficial adds and drops. One college used it both for preventing unofficial adds and drops and to prevent registration above tested levels and to record and update information, while 10 colleges indicated using it for all three reasons. Only 8 colleges indicated no use of the computer for registration.

Five colleges provided additional comments about the use of the computer, 2 saying they also used it for scoring tests during registration, another to check students on probation, and another to prevent registration conflicts. Colleges without computer capability to check prerequisites indicated this use was a high priority for the future.

Testing Procedures

Recommended and Required Testing

Colleges were asked to indicate how many required or recommended assessment for matriculation; 20 colleges reported requiring such assessment, while 32 said they recommended it. Colleges were more apt to require some kind of assessment for course placement, although even here the numbers were not large. Assessment for English placement was most often required, by 55 colleges, while it was recommended by an additional 30. Thirty-two colleges required assessment for

for reading placement; 43 recommended it. Only 25 colleges required math assessment; 42 recommended it.

Registering Untested Students

To the question of registering untested full-time students, 94 colleges responded, 52 saying that students could be registered without test scores. Twenty of this group, however, noted that tests would be available during registration.

Only 16 colleges said students could not register without scores, but a majority of these qualifed their statements to restrict untested students to courses without prerequisites. Nine indicated students without test scores could not register in English classes, while 6 said such students would not be allowed to enroll in any classes with prerequisites. One college said students without test scores would be limited to eight units. Fifty colleges said testing was available during the registration period.

Testing Centers

Sixty-two colleges indicated they had a testing center, while 36 did not. (One respondent who indicated her college had a center added, "Kinda.") Twenty-two of the 62 colleges which had centers (34.9%) said their centers were open for testing by appointment all college year, and an

additional 19 (30.16%) said theirs were open by appointment all calendar year. Nine colleges (14.3%) maintained a center available on a drop-in basis, while 17 (27.0%) provided a center open only at specified dates on the calendar.

Seven colleges (11.1%) added comments. One college observed it tested daily without an office and another that it used rooms as needed. Several colleges indicated their centers were available to special classes, such as career classes, or to special groups working with counselors. One respondent said his center was open on a drop-in basis and also scheduled tests three times daily.

Other Testing Available

When testing offices existed, many offered a variety of tests as services to students as well as provided ongoing or specially scheduled opportunities for students to take achievement or placement exams. The tests listed by the 62 colleges with centers can generally be categorized as academic insturments or as assessment for career or personal information. Twenty-six different academic instruments and 21 career and vocational inventories were named. Academic tests most often reported were the American College Test, Scholastic Aptitude Test, Comparative Guidance and Placement Test, and the Nelson-Denny. The Strong-Campbell was the career and personal test most often reported.

Conclusion

The study cited above clearly demonstrates the diversity in the registration and assessment practices of the California community colleges. The colleges must now ask themselves whether the current wide range of practices best serves the needs of students in a statewide system.

It should be noted that many of the responding colleges indicated the entire area of registration and assessment was under review. This review has no doubt been enhanced by the focus on matriculation begun by the Chancellor's Office in the summer of 1983. Assured that funding legislation would be passed by the Legislature, the Chancellor's Office encouraged colleges to compete for money to fund new matriculation procedures in approximately 20 colleges; and many colleges did submit proposals. Unfortunately, although the legislation was passed, it was vetoed by the Governor and no funds were available. A number of colleges nevertheless proceeded with their plans, and legislation was submitted again in 1985.

The argument that such programs are costly will be countered by identifying the practical and human costs of failing to provide community college students with sufficient information and guidance. It seems clear that major changes will soon be taking place in the nation's largest community college system.

References

Rourds, J. (1983). Admissions, Placement, and Competency: Assessment Practices in California Community Colleges, 1982-1983. Doctoral Dissertation, Brigham Young University.

Table 1

The Procedures for Student Registration and Enrollment in California Community Colleges: Numbers and Percents Practicing Specific Procedures, 1982-1983

Question 1: Advising for classes is done primarily by: Response	Number	Percent of Those Responding (N=99)
a. counselors	98	97.8
b. faculty	20	20.2
c. classified	4	4.0
d. other	5	5.1

Question 2: Registration for classes is done: Response	Number	Percent of Those Responding (N=98)
a. arena style	55	56.1
b. individual conferences with counselors or staff	33	33.7
c. large groups	20	20.4
d. by mail	37	37.7
e. other	24	24.5

Question 3: An orientation session of: Response	Number	Percent of Those Responding (N=97)
a. 4.08 av hours is required of all new students	25	25.8
b. 3.50 av hours is recommended for all new students	54	56.7
c. 7.60 av hours is provided for special groups (as, certain majors)	21	21.6
d. not offered	13	13.6
e. other	5	5.2

Question 4: A counselor conference is: Response	Number	Percent of Those Responding (N=99)
a. required before registration	42[a]	42.4
b. recommended before registration	49[b]	49.5
c. not needed	10[c]	10.1
d. other	8	8.1

(continued)

Table 1 (Continued)

Question 5: Add and Drops (mark A and/or D, if appropriate): Response	Number	Percent of Those Responding (N=93)
a. require a counselor's signature	17 A/D	18.3
	9 A only	7.7
	2 D only	2.2
b. require faculty signature	36 A/D	38.7
	25 A only	26.9
	3 D only	3.2
c. may be done without signature	26 A/D	27.9
	10 A only	10.8
	22 D only	23.7
d. other	16	17.7

Question 6: A computer is used: Response	Number	Percent of Those Responding (N=94)
a. to prevent unofficial adds and drops	34	36.2
b. to prevent students registering above level at which they were tested	14	14.9
c. to record and update registration	84	89.4
d. is NOT used in registration	8	8.5
e. other	5	5.3

Question 7: Full-time students without placement or other entrance scores: Response	Number	Percent of Those Responding (N=94)
a. can be tested during registration	50	53.2
b. are registered without scores	52	55.3
c. may not register	16	17.0
d. other	9	9.6

Question 8: In addition to advising/placing, testing data is used to: Response	Number	Percent of Those Responding (N=89)
a. develop long-range plans	55	61.2
b. make curriculum decisions	64	71.9
c. do institutional research	58	65.2
d. other	10	11.2

(Continued)

Table 1 (Continued)

Question 9: There is/is not a testing center: Response	Number	Percent of Those Responding (N=98)
a. is	62	63.3
b. is not	36	36.7

Question 10: If "is" the office is open for testing: Response	Number	Percent of Those Responding (N=62)
a. by appointment all college year	22	34.9
b. by appointment all calendar year	19	30.2
c. only at specified dates on calendar	17	27.0
d. on a drop-in basis	9	14.3
e. other	7	11.1

Question 11: For full-time students (12 or more units) a general aptitude test or achievement test: Response	Number	Percent of Those Responding (N=99)
a. is required at entrance	20	20.2
b. is recommended at entrance	19	19.2
c. is not asked for	55	55.6
d. other	4	4.0

Question 12: For part-time students, a general aptitude or achievement test: Response	Number	Percent of Those Responding (N=99)
a. is required at entrance	7	7.1
b. is recommended at entrance	26	26.3
c. is not asked for	56	56.6
d. other	7	7.1

[a]6 of these could be either counselor or faculty

[b]1 of these could be either counselor or faculty not designate counselor or faculty

[c]5 of these restricted "not needed" to students below a specific number of units

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